

Is Plutarch Fair to Nikias?*

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It is almost generally admitted that Plutarch was of a kindly and well-meaning nature, and that, owing to this, he had a tendency to look sympathetically at historical figures, bring into relief the good aspects of a man's character rather than the bad ones, and treat with leniency and understanding the weaknesses and shortcomings of his heroes.¹ Acknowledged exceptions, although not on moral but on philosophical or philological grounds, are his fierce attacks against the Stoics and the Epicureans and, above all, his treatise on the malignity of Herodotus. The aim of this paper is to indicate a similar exception of this kind, which occurs in the *Lives* and concerns Plutarch's unexpectedly severe judgement on Nikias, and to try to give some explanation for it.

Plutarch's prejudice against Nikias is perhaps most evident in the *Comparison* with Crassus, but several unfavorable judgements and innuendos can be also discerned in the *Life* proper. This does not mean that Plutarch never praises Nikias nor that he altogether rejects him. It only means that, contrary to his usual tendency (in other *Lives*) of stressing the

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¹ Cf. R. H. Barrow, *Plutarch and his Times* (London 1967) 147: "It was a mind essentially kindly, unwilling to think ill of anyone, tolerant . . ."; F. H. Sandbach, "Plutarch" in *Camb. Anc. Hist.* XI (1936) 700: "He was deeply interested in people and always ready . . . to find good in them"; A. J. Gossage, "Plutarch" in *Latin Biography*, ed. T. A. Dorey (London 1967) 56: "Plutarch is more clearly concerned to present a character in a good light and to reject evidence suggestive of blemishes"; and H. A. Holden in the Introduction of his *Nikias* (Cambridge 1887) XLIII speaks of Plutarch's "all-absorbing desire to exhibit his hero in the most favorable light."

good qualities of his heroes, in this *Life* he appears to try to bring into relief the faults of Nikias.²

In the second chapter Plutarch mentions Aristotle's opinion that Nikias was one of the three best Athenian politicians, as far as their goodwill towards the people was concerned,³ and then proceeds to explain why the demos, although they had their own champion, Kleon, also favored and supported Nikias. The reason, according to Plutarch, was not only Kleon's rapacity and effrontery,⁴ but mainly Nikias' own political conduct, which, by being neither harsh nor offensive but, on the contrary, blended with some circumspection, gave the impression that he actually feared the multitude.⁵ Moreover, Plutarch continues, Nikias was by nature timid and pessimistic (2. 5: ἀθαρσῆς καὶ δύσελπις), although in war he managed to hide his cowardice thanks to his good fortune; for on the whole he was a successful general (*ib.*: ἐν μὲν τοῖς πολεμικοῖς ἀπέκρυπτεν εὐτυχίᾳ τὴν δειλίαν· κατώρθου γὰρ ὁμαλῶς στρατηγῶν—(cf. also p. 4 below). In other words, Plutarch tells us here that Nikias' achievements on the battlefield were not the result of any ability but rather of his good fortune, which, moreover, concealed his innate cowardice. Thucydides, however, whom Plutarch greatly respects and follows closely in this *Life*, says absolutely nothing to this effect.⁶

Another manifestation of Nikias' cowardice, according to Plutarch, was his pusillanimity in political life and his sensitiveness regarding slanders (2. 6: τὸ δ' ἐν τῇ πολιτείᾳ ψοφοδεὲς καὶ πρὸς τοὺς συκοφάντας εὐθορύβητον αὐτοῦ). In order to avoid a calumny, Nikias would buy the prospective slanderer off, says Plutarch, and in general his cowardice was a source of revenue for scoundrels (4. 3: καὶ ὅλως πρόσδοδος ἦν αὐτοῦ τοῖς τε πονηροῖς ἢ δειλίᾳ). These characteristics, Plutarch observes, made him popular with the masses, since they betrayed his fear of the demos, but they also occasioned humiliating remarks on the part of the comic poets with whom, however, Plutarch appears to agree.⁷

Chapter 3 deals with Nikias' magnificent choral and gymnastic exhibitions, his lavish donations and various other offerings to the Athenian

² This has been already noted by Westlake, *NT* 64: "Plutarch's tone is more critical in the *Nicias* than in most *Lives*."

³ The other two are Thucydides, son of Milesias, and Theramenes (*Ath. pol.* 28. 5).

⁴ *Nik.* 2. 2: ἀντίταγμα ποιουμένων αὐτὸν πρὸς τὴν Κλέωνος βδελυρίαν καὶ τὸλμαν . . . 2. 3: ὅμως δὲ καὶ τὴν πλεονεξίαν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν ἱταμότητα καὶ τὸ θράσος ὁρῶντες . . . οἱ πολλοὶ τὸν Νικίαν ἐπήγοντο.

⁵ *Nik.* 2. 4: Καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἦν αὐστηρὸν οὐδ' ἐπαχθὲς ἄγαν αὐτοῦ τὸ σεμνόν, ἀλλ' εὐλαβεῖα τινὶ μεμιγμένον, αὐτῷ τῷ δεδιέναι δοκοῦντι τοὺς πολλοὺς δημαγωγοῦν.

⁶ See also below pp. 4–5. For Nikias' military abilities see *HCT*, vol. IV 462, and for Plutarch's admiration of Thucydides cf. *Nik.* 1. 1. Yet, as Westlake remarks (*NT* 64), many of Plutarch's inferences from Thucydides' account are unfavorable (cf. n. 2 above).

⁷ *Nik.* 4. 8: Ὑποδηλοῖ δὲ καὶ Φρόνιχος τὸ ἀθαρσὲς αὐτοῦ καὶ καταπεπληγμένον ἐν τούτοις: Ἦν γὰρ πολίτης ἀγαθός, ὥς εὖ οἶδ' ἐγώ, / κούχ' ὑποταγείς ἐβάδιζεν, ὥσπερ Νικίας. See also earlier *ib.* 4. 4–7.

people. Plutarch appears to recount the relevant details with certain admiration, but the way he introduces us to Nikias' munificence is somewhat disparaging. For he thinks fit to remember Perikles here and say that he, leading the Athenians by means of real excellence and powerful eloquence (3. 1: ἀπό τ' ἀρετῆς ἀληθινῆς καὶ λόγου δυνάμεως τὴν πόλιν ἄγων), had no need to resort to such artifices in order to win them over. Nikias, by contrast, lacking these qualities⁸ but being excessively rich, employed his wealth to secure popular favor (*ib.*: Νικίας δὲ τοῦτοις μὲν λειπόμενος, οὐσίᾳ δὲ προέχων, ἅπ' αὐτῆς ἐδημαγωγῇ).

A brief consideration of Plutarch's characterization of Perikles reveals his bias from another angle. In the *Life* of Perikles he relates without comment that Perikles, as a young man, was exceedingly fearful of the multitude (*Per.* 7. 1: νέος μὲν ὦν σφόδρα τὸν δῆμον εὐλαβεῖτο). Nor does he find there any wrong with Perikles' policies to counterbalance Kimon's popularity, policies involving assumed manners and simulation which he obviously criticizes in Nikias. For Perikles, although relatively rich and of a brilliant lineage, espoused the cause of the poor and the many instead of that of the few and the rich, and this, Plutarch himself says, was contrary to his nature which was anything but popular (*Per.* 7. 3: παρὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ φύσιν ἥκιστα δημοτικὴν οὖσαν). Yet, being inferior to Kimon in wealth, by means of which the latter supposedly allured the populace, Perikles resorted to the distribution of public money (*Per.* 9. 2). Plutarch relates all this, but neither in the *Life* of Perikles nor in the *Life* of Kimon does he make any negative comment on the use of wealth for winning public favor. He does so, however, in a rather less appropriate context (for Nikias' generosity did not serve only his political ambitions; it was partly due to his piety, as we shall see), namely in the *Life* of Nikias. Thus he reduces Nikias' munificence to an artifice for winning public support as opposed to the real excellence of Perikles, who had no need to assume any "persuasive mannerisms" with the multitude.

Next, Plutarch characterizes Nikias' munificence as ostentatious and vulgar (4. 1: πολὺν τὸ . . . πανηγυρικὸν καὶ ἀγοραῖον), but he also adds that, judging from his character and manners, one could attribute it to his reverent piety (εὐσεβείας ἐπακολούθημα). This piety, however, he then tries to disparage by quoting a certain Pasiphon, whom he never mentions again in all his writings, who had written that Nikias would sacrifice every day to the gods and keep a personal diviner in his house, only ostensibly to consult him about public affairs; in reality he employed him for making inquiries about his own private matters, especially in connection with his silver mines at Laurion.

On account of his fear of informers Nikias avoided social intercourse and familiar gatherings; his public duties undoubtedly took much of his

⁸ Cf. also *Moralia* 802D.

time, but, even if he had no public business, he still stayed at home to avoid people (5. 2: δυσπρόσοδος ἦν καὶ δυσέντευκτος, οἰκουρῶν καὶ κατακεκλειμένος). This reminds us again of the way of life which Perikles had adopted,⁹ possibly on the advice of Anaxagoras, whom Plutarch admires. Here, however, the man who helped Nikias to acquire a similar dignity, a certain Hiero, is rather slightly said to have supported him by representing him to the people as one who labored busily for the sake of the city.¹⁰

The early military activity of Nikias is also presented in a rather unfavorable light. For Nikias, according to Plutarch, seeing that the eminent and powerful commanders were finally discredited by the people, despite their successes, tried to avoid major and difficult commands and was content with generalships of secondary importance. But even in these his chief aim was safety and therefore he was most successful, of course (6. 2: ὅπου δ' αὐτὸς στρατεύοιτο τῆς ἀσφαλείας ἐχόμενος καὶ τὰ πλεῖστα κατορθῶν, ὡς εἰκός . . .).¹¹ Moreover, Plutarch continues, all these successes Nikias would not ascribe to his own abilities or valor but to fortune and the divine powers, so as to escape envy. Yet, if we go to Thucydides for the details of these commands, we shall nowhere find any role played by fortune in Nikias' successes, while one of them at least, namely the expedition against Korinth in 425, is described in terms of a significant enterprise, and the clash between the two armies as strongly contested.¹² It should also be noted that in other *Lives* Plutarch praises the commander who ascribes his victories to fortune or the divine powers, and commends this kind of modesty, both of which he carefully avoids doing in the case of Nikias.¹³

The Sphakteria episode is another instance where Plutarch finds serious fault with Nikias. What he did, he says, by stepping voluntarily out of office appeared more disgraceful than casting away his shield, because he

⁹ Cf. *Perikles* 7. 5 f.

¹⁰ The phraseology of the passages concerned speaks for itself. *Per.* 4. 6: 'Ο δὲ πλεῖστα Περικλεῖ συγγενόμενος καὶ μάλιστα περιθείς ὄγκον αὐτῷ καὶ φρόνημα δημαγωγίας ἐμβριθέστερον, ὅλως τε μετεωρίσας καὶ συνεξάρας τὸ ἀξίωμα τοῦ ἥθους, Ἀναξαγόρας ἦν. *Nik.* 5. 3: Καὶ ὁ μάλιστα ταῦτα συντραφεδὼν καὶ συμπεριτιθείς ὄγκον αὐτῷ καὶ δόξαν Ἰέρων ἦν . . . προσποιούμενος δ' υἱὸς εἶναι Διονυσίου τοῦ Χαλκοῦ προσαγορευθέντος. The συντραφεδὼν of the second passage clearly points to a deliberate pose for the sake of "a public relations exercise," as A.W.H. Adkins puts it ("The Arete of Nikias: Thucydides 7. 86," *GRBS* 16 [1975] 389 n. 38). The same insinuation is evident, I think, in 5. 2, where Nikias' friends, trying to excuse his seclusion, would say to those who were in waiting at his door that Nikias was even then busy with public affairs (. . . ὡς καὶ τότε Νικίου πρὸς δημοσίας χρείας . . . ὄντος—Note the use of ὡς).

¹¹ But why a cautious general should be necessarily successful Plutarch does not bother to explain.

¹² Cf. *Thuc.* 4. 42–44, esp. 43. 2: καὶ ἦν ἡ μάχη καρτερὰ καὶ ἐν χειρὶ πᾶσα.

¹³ Cf. *Sulla* 6. 5–9, 34. 3–4; *Timol.* 36. 5, and also *Moralia* 322E, 542E–543A.

was thought to have abandoned his command¹⁴ out of cowardice, thus giving his political opponent the opportunity of a spectacular achievement. Moreover, Plutarch continues, Kleon's success, enhancing, as was natural, his reputation and influence in the city, caused no little harm to the Athenians (chs. 7 and 8). Thucydides, however, has not a single word against Nicias in relation to this affair,¹⁵ and it is perhaps rather unlikely that Plutarch would have found such a condemnation of Nicias in another historian.¹⁶ As a matter of fact, Thucydides believed that Kleon's boastful promise to capture or slay on the spot the Spartans of Sphakteria was mad (μανιώδης, cf. 4. 39. 3), and confesses that his success was totally unexpected (4. 40. 1: Παρὰ γνώμην τε δὴ μάλιστα τῶν κατὰ τὸν

¹⁴ Gomme (*HCT* v. III 468) rightly remarks that from Thucydides' narrative we cannot know if Nicias had any command at Pylos; and he suggests that the words τῆς ἐπὶ Πύλῳ ἀρχῆς (*Thuc.* 4. 28.3) mean only that "if reinforcements were to be sent, Nicias, as strategos, would have good claim to their command."

¹⁵ Cf. J. de Romilly, *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism*, transl. Ph. Thody (Oxford 1963) 181 n. 5: "Thucydides is constantly sympathetic towards Nicias . . . In the episode itself one can see how he differs from those who tried to criticize Nicias for his 'desertion'." By contrast, Westlake (*NT* 60) thinks that "Thucydides must have recognized that his account would expose Nicias to damaging charges." And on the whole Westlake regards the prevailing belief among modern scholars that Thucydides "treats Nicias too indulgently" as highly disputable. Cf. his *IT* 182 and 185. Gomme later noted *ad loc.* (*HCT* v. III 469): "The light-hearted dereliction of duty by Nicias, though not concealed, is not explicitly condemned." Nicias, however, is neither explicitly nor implicitly condemned (cf. also Westlake, *IT* 88) and, as a matter of fact, Thucydides counts him among the wise Athenians in 4. 28. 5 (see n. 18 below). So the charge of dereliction of duty is perhaps too severe and, besides, somewhat contradictory to Gomme's own suggestion in the previous note. On the other hand, Holden believed (XLIII) that Nicias' temporary discredit, "because of his resignation in favour of Kleon, is probably an inference of Plutarch's own from allusions in the contemporary poets." This may well be so, but would Nicias have been discredited, if Kleon had failed? What might have occasioned Nicias' disrepute was not his resignation it itself, but rather Kleon's unexpected success (see further pp. 5–6).

¹⁶ As a matter of fact, whether he did or not is of little importance; for even if he did, it was his own decision to accept the condemnation and repeat it (contrast his usual tendency in Gossage's quotation, n. 1 above). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that in connection with the Sphakteria incident Diodorus makes no mention at all of Nicias (cf. 12. 63). Besides, there is no need to believe that Philistus and Timaeus were biased against Nicias, as some scholars imply (e.g. Westlake, *NT* 63 and 64 nn. 1 and 3). The fragments to which they refer are rather irrelevant, while Pausanias' information (1. 29. 12), going back to Philistus, that Nicias' name was deliberately omitted from the casualty list at Athens because he had surrendered himself (see p. 330 below), shows, if true, the feelings of the Athenian authorities and not of Philistus (cf. also Westlake, *NT* 64 n. 5). In my view, since Nicias' opposition to the expedition was well-known, it is more likely that the Sicilian historians were less hostile to him. Cf. Diodorus (and that also means Ephorus to some extent) 12. 83. 5 and esp. 13. 27. 3–4.

πόλεμον τοῦτο τοῖς Ἑλλήσιν ἐγένετο).¹⁷ So, we are allowed, I think, to surmise that Thucydides himself must have sided with those sensible Athenians (Nikias undoubtedly among them) who, by trusting this particular generalship to Kleon, looked forward to his being killed.¹⁸ But regardless of what Thucydides says or might have thought, one is also allowed to suppose that Nikias gave up the command because he wanted either to humiliate Kleon by calling his bluff or, taking into account the stalemate at Sphakteria, to give him an opportunity to try his own way for the sake of the city.¹⁹ The fact that Kleon's unexpected success increased his political influence, owing to which he subsequently made havoc in the political life of Athens,²⁰ is a judgement *a posteriori*, and Plutarch himself

¹⁷ As a matter of fact, this refers to the unexpected surrender of the Spartans, which, however, vindicated Kleon. Some modern scholars give the debate over Pylos in the Athenian assembly another dimension. Connor (116–17), for example, revives an older view (cf. G. Busolt, *Griechische Geschichte* [Gotha 1893–1904], v. III 1101 n. 2) and suggests that Kleon was collaborating with Demosthenes, the commander at Pylos, and deliberately provoked Nikias by questioning his manliness (Thuc. 4. 27. 5: εἰ ἄνδρες εἶεν οἱ στρατηγοί, πλεῦσσαντας λαβεῖν τοὺς ἐν τῇ νήσῳ), in order to cause his resignation and take over himself (but see *HCT* v. III 471 and n. 14 above. Against Busolt cf. also Westlake, *IT* 72 n.1). But then, why should Kleon have needlessly made his bragging promise once Nikias had resigned and the command was given to him according to his plan? For Connor, Kleon's behavior supports his suggestion, but, if he is right, *μανιώδης* seems to describe better Kleon's behavior rather than the contents of his promise. On the other hand, Grote (v. V 264 ff.) expresses his surprise for this characterization on the part of Thucydides and accuses him of bias against Kleon. On this see also Gomme, "Thucydides and Kleon," *Ἑλληνικά* 13 (1954) 1–10 and A. G. Woodhead, "Thucydides' portrait of Cleon," *Mnemosyne* 13 (1960) 290 and esp. 316. Cf. also Westlake, *IT* 60 ff., esp. 70 f.

¹⁸ Thuc. 4. 28. 5: Τοῖς δὲ Ἀθηναίοις ἐνέπεσε μὲν τι καὶ γέλωτος τῇ κουφολογίᾳ αὐτοῦ, ἀσμένους δ' ὁμῶς ἐγίνετο τοῖς σώφροσι τῶν ἀνθρώπων, λογιζομένους δυοῖν ἀγαθοῖν τοῦ ἐτέρου τεύξεσθαι, ἢ Κλέωνος ἀπαλλαγῆσεσθαι, ὃ μᾶλλον ἤλπιζον, ἢ σφαλεῖσι γνώμῃς Λακεδαιμονίου σφίσι χειρώσεσθαι. The ultimate meaning of ἀπαλλαγῆσεσθαι here is that the Athenians expected that Kleon would be killed during the operations at Pylos. Cf. Aristoph. *Equit.* 973–76: ἥδιστον φάος ἡμέρας / ἔσται τοῖσι παροῦσι καὶ / τοῖσι δεῦρ' ἀφικνουμένοις / ἦν Κλέων ἀπόληται.

¹⁹ Cf. *Nik.* 7. 4: καὶ μὴ θρασύνεσθαι λόγοις ἀκινδύνοις, ἀλλ' ἔργον τι τῇ πόλει παρασεῖν ἄξιον σπουδῆς. For Grote (255–56), however, Nikias appears in this occasion so "deplorably timid, ignorant and reckless of the public interest," seeking only to ruin his political adversary, that he forces Kleon "into the supreme command against his own strenuous protest, persuaded that he will fail, so as to compromise the lives of many soldiers and the destinies of the state." Woodhead also (*op. cit.* 313 f.) finds Nikias' conduct here "highly reprehensible," but other scholars take a milder view. Westlake, *NT* 60: "He was perhaps guilty rather of miscalculation than of disloyalty to the state;" and Westlake's opinion on the peace efforts of Nikias, namely that nothing suggests that he "was deliberately sacrificing Athenian interests in order to further his own" (*IT* 95), is, I think, equally valid here. For a judicious defence of Nikias' conduct see A. B. West, "Pericles' Political Heirs," *CP* 19 (1924) 212–14.

²⁰ Grote (v. V 360 ff.), of course, does not agree with the picture of Kleon as a sinister demagogue, which rests upon the partial evidence of Thucydides and Aristophanes. Cf. also n. 44 below.

explicitly disapproves of such judgements, as we shall see in the *Comparison* with Crassus (p. 329 below).

The peace of Nikias provided, among other things, the exchange of strongholds, cities and prisoners of war, and the party to restore its gains first was to be decided by lot. Nikias now, says Plutarch, on the authority of Theophrastus, secretly bought up the lot, so that the Lacedaemonians would restore first (10. 1). Plutarch makes no comment on this act of Nikias, which, although somewhat dishonest, is indicative of his patriotism, and one tends to believe that this omission is due to moral grounds; but, once more, when we come to the *Comparison* (3. 4), we see that Plutarch does not object to political bribery, and in fact he indirectly praises Themistokles for buying off a worthless man from office at a time of emergency.²¹ The prejudice against Nikias, although the emphasis is somewhat different in the *Comparison*, is again evident.

Furthermore, Plutarch finds fault with Nikias in the way he conducted the Sicilian expedition right from the beginning. Nikias, he tells us, was wise to oppose the expedition,²² but, once he had failed to dissuade the Athenians or to be relieved of the command, he should have put aside his caution and hesitation and attacked the enemy at once. Now, to what extent a general can act contrary to what he believes to be strategically right is rather debatable, but then the question arises, why did Nikias accept the command under these circumstances? In my opinion, Thucydides' account shows that Nikias was practically trapped by the hard—as he thought—pre-conditions, which he himself had set to the Athenians for the realization of the expedition.²³ So, when the Athenians agreed to meet these conditions, Nikias could no longer go back on his word.²⁴ As for his plan—much

²¹ See also *Themist.* 6. 1–2.

²² *Nik.* 14. 1: Τὸ μὲν οὖν ἐναντιωθῆναι ψηφισομένην τῇ στρατείᾳ τὸν Νικίαν . . . ἀνδρὸς ἦν χρηστοῦ καὶ σώφρονος. That the Sicilian expedition was a mistake, if with some qualification, is also Thucydides' opinion. See 2. 65. 11 (ἡμαρτήθη καὶ ὁ ἐς Σικελίαν πλοῦς) and cf. de Romilly (*op. cit.* n. 15) 205–09.

²³ Cf. *Thuc.* 6. 19. 2: Καὶ ὁ Νικίας γνούς ὅτι . . . παρασκευῆς δὲ πλήθει, εἰ πολλὴν ἐπιτάξειε, τάχ' ἂν μεταστήσειεν αὐτούς . . . See also 6. 24. 1 and cf. Westlake, *IT* 172. Nikias employs in fact, as Connor points out (166), a technique well known from ancient rhetorical books. If one cannot prevent an action by arguing it is wrong, shameful etc., he can try to prevent it by arguing that it is too laborious and costly (cf. *Rhet. ad Alex.* 1421b24). That Nikias undertook this generalship against his will is also evident in the *Alkibiades* 18. 1 (ὁ δὲ Νικίας ἄκων μὲν ἡρέθη στρατηγός, οὐχ ἥκιστα τὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ διὰ τὸν συνάρχοντα φεύγων) and *Moralia* 802D (. . . ἀλλ' ὄχρετο βίᾳ φερόμενος εἰς Σικελίαν καὶ συνεκτραχηλιζόμενος). Cf. also *Thuc.* 6. 8. 4: Καὶ ὁ Νικίας ἀκούσιος μὲν ἡρημένος ἄρχειν. Yet G. de Sanctis believed (*Riv. di Fil. Class.* 7 [1929] 433 ff. = *Problemi di storia antica*, [Bari 1932] 109 ff.; cf. H. A. Murray, "Two Notes on the Evaluation of Nikias in Thucydides," *BICS* 8 [1961] 42) that Nikias was the real instigator of the expedition, because he wanted to "restore himself to favour and to cloak his political bungling!"

²⁴ Had he done so, he would have rightly been regarded as worse than Kleon, who also had not retreated, when trapped in his boasting. (See p. 5 and nn. 15 and 17 above).

scorned by later authors and modern scholars—first to make only a display of his fleet and then sail back to Athens, one should note that Thucydides, who relates in detail the plans of Nikias, Lamachos and Alkibiades, makes, at that point, no comment in favor of or against any of them.²⁵

In any case, Nikias' misgivings and his hesitation to attack the Syracusans at once are thought to have abated the enthusiasm of his men and boosted the courage of the enemy.²⁶ Yet, one might again wonder whether Nikias' procrastination was not owing merely to caution or timidity, but also to the fact that, after the recall of Alkibiades, Nikias tacitly decided to put into operation, albeit in a modified form, the plan of the former, on which Lamachos had also agreed.²⁷ Now, according to Alkibiades' plan, the Athenians should first rob the Syracusans of their allies by making the latter defect to their side, and then march against Syracuse itself.²⁸ That plan also involved some sort of delay, but at the same time it increased the safety of the Athenian troops, a factor to which Nikias attached, as we have seen (p. 4 above), supreme importance.

But, despite all his caution and hesitation, when Nikias moved his armament against Syracuse, he showed such excellent generalship, seizing strategic places, routing the invincible cavalry of the enemy, beating the Syracusans in many skirmishes and nearly cutting off their city from its hinterland despite his malady, that Plutarch feels somewhat forced to admit that the Athenians would have defeated the Syracusans many more times, if the gods or fortune had not opposed them at the very pinnacle of their

²⁵ Cf. Thuc. 6. 47–49. Nikias' proposal conformed to their typical orders from the Assembly (47: πλεῖν ἐπὶ Σελινούντα πάση τῇ στρατιᾷ, ἐφ' ὅπερ μάλιστα ἐπέμφθησαν), but also provided for some action, if need be (καὶ παραμείναντας Σελινουντίους ἢ βία ἢ ξυμβάσει διαλλάξαι αὐτοῖς), a detail suppressed by Plutarch. According to him, Nikias' plan αὐτίκα τε τὴν γνώμην ὑπεξέλυσε καὶ κατέβαλε τὸ φρόνημα τῶν ἀνδρῶν (*Nik.* 14. 3), which R. Flacelière (*Vies* VII, Budé, p. 292) rightly regards as "un jugement sévère sur Nikias." (Cf. Westlake, *NT* 64). Perhaps Plutarch was in favor of Lamachos' plan (*Nik.* 14. 2: ἀλλ' εὐθὺς ἔδει τοῖς πολεμίοις ἐμφύοντα καὶ προσκείμενον ἐλέγχειν τὴν τύχην ἐπὶ τῶν ἀγώνων) and so was Thucydides. Cf. 7. 42. 3: ἀφικόμενος γὰρ τὸ πρῶτον ὁ Νικίας φοβερὸς, ὥς οὐκ εὐθὺς προσέκειτο ταῖς Συρακούσαις . . . ὑπερώφη (cf. also *Nik.* 15. 3). But this again is a judgement *a posteriori*. Finally, Westlake notes (*NT* 62 and n. 1) that Lamachos' plan "is favored—perhaps erroneously—by most modern scholars." Cf. also Grote, v. VI 28 ff. One last remark: Demosthenes, leading the second, supporting force to Sicily, did not choose to linger and undergo what had happened to Nikias. He attacked the enemy as soon as he arrived and was heavily defeated (cf. next page and n. 31).

²⁶ Cf. *Nik.* 14. 2 (previous note) and 15. 3: ἀπωτάτω τῶν πολεμίων ἐκπεριπλέων Σικελίαν θάρσος ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς.

²⁷ Cf. Thuc. 6. 50. 1: Λάμαχος μὲν ταῦτα εἰπὼν ὅμως προσέθετο καὶ αὐτὸς τῇ Ἀλκιβιάδου γνώμῃ. See also *Alkibiades* 20. 2.

²⁸ Thuc. 6. 62 shows, I think, that Nikias was in fact following a plan that combined his own ideas with those of Alkibiades. See also 6. 71. 2, 74–88 and cf. *HCT* v. IV 339 and Westlake, *IT* 179 and 182.

power.²⁹ Is not this judgement somewhat inconsistent with Plutarch's earlier evaluation of Nicias' strategic qualities and efficiency?³⁰

Ch. 22 deals with the aftermath of the unsuccessful Athenian assault on Epipolai. Plutarch says nothing at all against Demosthenes, who, acting contrary to Nicias' advice, had led two thousand Athenians to slaughter,³¹ but openly suggests that Nicias' refusal to leave Sicily in time (when everyone appeared to wish for departure)³² was chiefly owing to his fear of his compatriots in Athens.³³ Thucydides, it is true, also refers to the apprehensions of Nicias regarding the malignant accusations which he would have to face on his return,³⁴ but he also mentions three more reasons

²⁹ Cf. *Nik.* chs. 16–17 and esp. 17. 4: οὐκ ὁκτῶ δὲ νίκας, ἀλλὰ πλείονας ἂν τις εὖροι Συρακοσίους νενικημένους ὑπ' αὐτῶν, πρὶν ἐκ θεῶν ὄντως ἢ τύχης ἀντίστασιν τινα γενέσθαι τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις, ἐπὶ πλείστον αἰρομένοις δυνάμεως.

³⁰ In *Nik.* 16. 9, Plutarch adopts the generally admitted view that Nicias' greatest fault was his excessive indecision, dilatoriness and caution, on account of which he missed the proper time for action (ἐπεὶ τὰς γε πράξεις οὐδεὶς ἂν ἐμέμψατο τοῦ ἀνδρός. Ὁρμήσας γὰρ ἦν ἐνεργὸς καὶ δραστήριος, ὀρμήσαι δὲ μελλήτης καὶ ἄτολμος—see also 18. 5–6). This comment also includes complimentary elements (cf. previous note and *Comp.* 5. 1), but, on the whole, Plutarch's opinion of Nicias' military competence is unfavorable and sometimes even derisive. See esp. 14. 2–4, 15. 3, *Comp.* 3. 5, 4. 3 (οὐ Σκάνδειαν, οὐ Μένδην ἐκκοπτέον οὐδὲ φεύγοντας Αἰγινήτας ἀπολελοιπότες τὴν ἑαυτῶν ὥσπερ ὄρνιθας εἰς ἑτέραν χώραν ἀποκεκρυμμένους ἐκθηρατέον). As for his dilatoriness Connor (199 n. 39) rightly notes that some of "Nicias' delays were not primarily of his own choosing, but were forced upon him by circumstances." For his earlier career see pp. 4–5 above, and for a brief appreciation of Nicias' military efficiency see *HCT* v. IV 462.

³¹ *Nik.* 21. 3: τοῦ Δημοσθένους εὐθύς ἐπιχειρεῖν τοῖς πολεμίοις κελεύοντος . . . ἐδεῖτο μὴδὲν ἀπεγνωσμένως πράττειν μὴδ' ἀνοήτως. Cf. also Thuc. 7. 43. 1: οὐκέτι ἐδόκει διατρίβειν, ἀλλὰ πείσας τὸν τε Νικίαν καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ξυνάρχοντας, ὡς ἐπενόει, τὴν ἐπιχείρησιν τῶν Ἐπιπολῶν ἐποιεῖτο. Because Thucydides does not explicitly mention whether Nicias raised any objections, Westlake affirms (*JT* 197 n. 2) that Plutarch, or his source, has taken liberties here with the facts, by transferring to this conference details from the conference after the defeat at Epipolai. This claim is not well-grounded; in my view, the πείσας in the text of Thucydides makes it more likely that Nicias had raised objections. See also Diodorus 13. 11. 3.

³² According to Diodorus (13. 12. 3), however, the military council which Nicias and Demosthenes convened was divided: τῶν δὲ εἰς τὸ συμβούλιον παρελημμένων οἱ μὲν τῷ Δημοσθένει συγκατέθεντο περὶ τῆς ἀναγωγῆς, οἱ δὲ τῷ Νικίᾳ τὴν αὐτὴν γνώμην ἀπεφάνοντο.

³³ *Nik.* 22. 2: Ὁ δὲ Νικίας χαλεπῶς ἤκουε τὴν φυγὴν καὶ τὸν ἀπόπλουν, οὐ τῷ μὴ δεδιέναι τοὺς Συρακοσίους, ἀλλὰ τῷ μᾶλλον τοὺς Ἀθηναίους καὶ τὰς ἐκείνων δίκας καὶ συκοφαντίας φοβεῖσθαι.

³⁴ Thuc. 7. 48. 3–4 and esp. 4: Οὐκ οὖν βούλεσθαι αὐτὸς γε . . . ἀδίκως ὑπ' Ἀθηναίων ἀπολέσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ ὑπὸ τῶν πολεμίων, εἰ δεῖ, κινδυνεύσας τοῦτο παθεῖν ἰδίᾳ. (Cf. *Plut., Fab.* 14. 7). From this K. J. Dover (*Thucydides Book VIII* [Oxford 1965] 41,—see also *HCT* v. IV 426) infers that Nicias would rather sacrifice the rest of the Athenian force and put his country in moral peril than face trial in Athens and risk execution; and he suggests that what underlay Nicias' obstinacy was, perhaps, "a perverse spite" (against the Athenian demos, by implication). Dover has surpassed even Grote here, who accused Nicias only of "guilty fatuity" and "childish credulity" (v. VI 145), but his inference and condemnation are not in line with the subsequent conduct of Nicias and his surrender to Gylippus (p. 330 f. below). Or would it have been difficult for him, one might ask, not to return to Athens, if he

for Nikias' unexpected insistence on remaining, at which Plutarch barely hints (cf. 22. 4). First, Nikias did not want an open vote for departure, because, if the enemy got wind of their decision, their very departure would be at risk;³⁵ secondly, because he believed that, despite the sorry situation of the Athenian army, the besieged Syracusans were even worse off;³⁶ and thirdly, because, according to his intelligence information, some of the Syracusans were almost ready to surrender to the Athenians.³⁷ All this information may have been deliberately false, of course,³⁸ but even then one could perhaps charge Nikias with misjudgement, or even credulity, but not with selfishness and cowardice.³⁹

Finally, owing to an epidemic among the Athenians, Nikias decided to remove their camp. But as they were ready to depart, there occurred an eclipse of the moon by night. Nikias, says Plutarch, along with the ignorant and superstitious, was terrified by the event (23. 1), and, as he happened to be without an expert soothsayer at that time (23. 7), he decided, and persuaded the Athenians, to wait for another full period of the moon before they departed (23. 9: ὁ δὲ Νικίας ἄλλην ἔπεισε σελήνης ἀναμένειν περίοδον). Thucydides' account shows once more Plutarch's prejudice. For, according to him, it is not Nikias and the ignorant and superstitious but the majority of the Athenians who urge the generals to halt the departure, and it is not Nikias but the diviners who enjoin the twenty-seven days delay.⁴⁰

wanted to save his skin? Other scholars are not so absolute in their judgement and take more into account Thucydides' evidence in 7. 48–49. Cf. de Romilly, *Thucydide VI–VII* (Budé) 170 and Westlake, *IT* 198 f.

³⁵ Cf. Thuc. 7. 48. 1. Westlake (*IT* 199) shrewdly remarks here: "as well as being a safeguard against detection by the enemy, the absence of an open vote would hamper the prosecution if, after returning to Athens, any of the generals were impeached there."

³⁶ Cf. Thuc. 7. 48. 2, 5 (Τὰ τε Συρακοσίων ἔφη ὅμως ἔτι ἥσσω τῶν σφετέρων εἶναι); 49. 1. See also *Nik.* 21. 4 and cf. de Romilly, n. 34 above.

³⁷ Thuc. 48. 2: Καὶ ἦν γάρ τι καὶ ἐν ταῖς Συρακούσαις βουλόμενον τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις τὰ πράγματα ἐνδοῦναι, ἐπεκηρυκεύετο ὡς αὐτὸν καὶ οὐκ εἶα ἀπανίστασθαι. See also *Nik.* 21. 5.

³⁸ Cf. Facelière (n. 25) 298: "car certains de ses informateurs peut-être le trompaient." Dover (n. 34) 40 is sure that this was the case and speaks of a "fifth column" among the Syracusans.

³⁹ Cf. Grote, v. VI 145: "Childish as such credulity seems, we are nevertheless compelled to admit it as real." On the cowardice charge see n. 34 above and cf. Nikias' own claim in Thuc. 6. 9. 2: καὶ ἥσσαν ἐτέρων περὶ τῷ ἔμαντοῦ σώματι ὀρρωδῶ. See also Connor, p. 163.

⁴⁰ Thuc. 7. 50. 4: Καὶ οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι οἱ τε πλείους ἐπισχεῖν ἐκέλευον τοὺς στρατηγοὺς ἐνθύμιον ποιούμενοι, καὶ ὁ Νικίας . . . οὐδ' ἂν διαβουλευσασθαι ἐπιῆκε πρὶν, ὥς οἱ μάντις ἐξηγοῦντο, τρεῖς ἑννέα ἡμέρας μέναι, ὅπως ἂν πρότερον κινήθῃ. Similar is the testimony of Diodorus 13. 12. 6: Διόπερ ὁ Νικίας . . . συνεκάλεσε τοὺς μάντις. Τούτων δ' ἀποφηνάμενων ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι τὰς εἰθισμένας τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἀναβαλέσθαι τὸν ἔκπλουν . . . Yet, despite these explicit statements, Westlake asserts (*NT* 63) that "it cannot be held that the greater part of the army is

Passing now to the *Comparison* with Crassus, we see that Nikias comes out superior in most of the headings under which Plutarch chooses to compare the two men, but this superiority is curtailed by several remarks to the detriment of Nikias. For example, although it is acknowledged that Nikias, by contrast to Crassus' military inadequacy, was a successful general and the Athenians kept electing him to office, even against his will, because they trusted his reasonableness and wisdom,⁴¹ it is also added that, if wrong must be done, one should abandon justice for something great, such as the conquest of the East, and not for something trivial, such as raiding small towns and chasing their fleeing inhabitants (*Comp.* 4. 3; cf. n. 30).^{41a} Moreover, says Plutarch, one also has to take into account what would have happened had Crassus managed to fulfill his purpose. For, certainly, it is not fair to praise Alexander's expedition and, at the same time, blame Crassus. Those who do that make a judgement *a posteriori*, which is wrong (4. 4: οὐκ εὖ τὰ πρῶτα κρίνουσιν ἀπὸ τῶν τελευταίων).⁴²

In other instances the bias against Nikias is more evident. E.g., Nikias' political career and achievements are recognized as more important (2. 7), but after all, says Plutarch, Crassus had to vie with such great men as Pompey and Caesar, while Nikias contended with inferior opponents such as Kleon and Hyperbolos.⁴³ One cannot help noting here that Hyperbolos is rather irrelevant in connection with Nikias, the important figure of

associated with Nikias in his superstitious fears in order to lessen his responsibility." For, as Dover points out (*HCT*, v. IV 429), "Thucydides' criticism of Nikias is not that he was more superstitious than the men whom he commanded but that as an educated man in a responsible position he should have paid less attention to seers." Connor (194 n. 27), however, is right in making the point that "confronted with this mood in the army and the interpretation of the soothsayers, no Athenian commander would find it easy to urge an immediate retreat." I should add that in promptly condemning Nikias for his overscrupulous regard for religious omens, modern scholars tend to judge him in terms of their own enlightened times. Yet, the Spartans, who had a similar regard for omens, are not less respected because of this.

⁴¹ *Comp.* 3. 6: Ἐκεῖνο μέντοι μεγάλης ἐπικεικίας σημεῖον, ὅτι δυσχεραίνοντα τὸ πολεμεῖν αἰεὶ καὶ φεύγοντα τὸ στρατηγεῖν οὐκ ἐπαύοντο χειροτονοῦντες ὡς ἐμπειρότατον καὶ βέλτιστον. See also 5. 1–2 and cf. *Alkib.* 13. 1: καὶ Νικίαν τὸν Νικηράτου . . . στρατηγὸν ἄριστον εἶναι δοκοῦντα . . . Murray (*op. cit.* n. 23 above, 35), however, following G. F. Bender, *Der Begriff des Staatsmannes bei Thukydides* (Würzburg 1938) 49–51, believes that, according to Thucydides, Nikias neglected or lacked ζῦνεσις. But Westlake (*IT* 210) convincingly argues against this and finds nothing in Thucydides suggesting that "he believed Nikias to have been lacking in intelligence."

^{41a} Note, however, that the Euripidean lines to which Plutarch appeals here (*Phoen.* 524 f.: εἴπερ γὰρ ἀδικεῖν χρή, τυραννίδος πέρι / κάλλιστον ἀδικεῖν), he explicitly condemns in *Moralia* 18D–E and 125D.

⁴² But this is exactly what Plutarch himself, Thucydides and most scholars do when they condemn Nikias' conduct of war in Sicily. See p. 6 and n. 25 above.

⁴³ *Comp.* 2. 4: ὁ δὲ Κράσσοις ὑψηλὸς περὶ γε ταῦτα καὶ μεγαλόφρων, οὐ πρὸς Κλέωνας οὐδ' Ὑπερβόλους . . . τοῦ ἀγῶνος ὄντος, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὴν Καίσαρος λαμπρότητα καὶ τρεῖς τοῦ Πομπηίου θριάμβους . . .

Alkibiades, his main political opponent, is not mentioned, and Kleon, regardless of his moral foibles, was in no way deficient in political shrewdness or military capacities.⁴⁴

Nikias, says Plutarch, should not have given in to Kleon's presumptuousness and put a base man into office; neither should Crassus have risked so much in the war against Spartacus. But Crassus, after all, had the legitimate ambition to finish the slave war himself, lest Pompey should come and rob him of his glory, whereas Nikias had no excuse for surrendering office to Kleon. He did not step down from a promising or easy command, but fearing the dangers, which that particular generalship involved, he preferred to betray the common interest in order to secure his personal safety.⁴⁵ This, I think, is a very severe and unfair judgement. In the first place, Thucydides neither says nor hints at anything against Nikias in relation to this affair (see p. 5 and n. 15 above); but also in the *Life* proper we can nowhere find Nikias showing such interest in his personal safety at the expense of the common good. On the contrary, his first priority always appears to be the public interest and the safety of his men.⁴⁶

Finally, Plutarch's prejudice against Nikias culminates, perhaps, in the way he relates and interprets the deaths of the two men. Crassus' death, he tells us, was less blameworthy (ἀμεμπτότερος), for he did not surrender himself, nor was he cheated by the enemy (5. 4: οὐ παραδοὺς ἑαυτὸν οὐδὲ δεθεὶς οὐδὲ φενακισθεὶς). Nikias, on the contrary, hoping to be saved in an inglorious way put himself into the hands of his enemies, thus making his death a greater disgrace (*ib.*: ὁ δὲ Νικίας αἰσχρᾶς καὶ ἄκλεοῦς ἐλπίδι σωτηρίας ὑποπεσὼν τοῖς πολεμίοις, αἰσχίονα ἑαυτῷ τὸν θάνατον ἐποίησεν). Neither of these interpretations is endorsed by the facts, while the contradiction with the details in the *Life* of Nikias is most glaring. Crassus, it is true (as Plutarch tells us, that is), had not believed in the sudden conciliatory proposals of the Parthians and was certain of their fraud (cf. *Cras.* 31. 2), but, being forced by his soldiers to accept them, he

⁴⁴ Cf. Connor 116: "Kleon, whatever his faults, was clearly a clever and skillful politician." See also Woodhead (*op. cit.* n. 17 above, 290, and also 304, about his military competence) and Grote (n. 20 above).

⁴⁵ Cf. *Comp.* 3. 1-6 and esp. 3. 3 (Οὐ γὰρ ἐλπίδας οὐδὲ ῥαστώνην ἐχούσης ἐξέσθη τῷ ἐχθρῷ φιλοτιμίας καὶ ἀρχῆς, ἀλλὰ κίνδυνον ὑφορώμενος ἐν τῇ στρατηγίᾳ μέγαν, ἠγάπησε τὸ καθ' αὐτὸν ἐν ἀσφαλεὶ θέμενος προέσθαι τὸ κοινόν) and 3. 5 ('Ο δ' αὐτὸν ἐπὶ Μίνφω καὶ Κύθηρα καὶ Μηλίους τοὺς ταλαιπώρους φυλάττων στρατηγόν, εἰ (δὲ) δέοι μάχεσθαι Λακεδαιμονίοις, ἀποδυνάμενος τὴν χλαμύδα καὶ . . . στρατηγίαν ἐμπειρίας ἄκρας δεομένην παραδιδούς, οὐ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ προίεται δόξαν, ἀλλὰ τὴν τῆς πατρίδος ἀσφάλειαν καὶ σωτηρίαν. But see nn. 19 and 39 above.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Nik.* 6. 2 (p. 4 above), 10. 1 (p. 325 above), his vindicated disbelief in the prospects of financial aid from Segesta (Thuc. 6. 12. 1, 22, 46. 2) and the terms under which he surrendered to Gylippus. See also de Romilly (n. 34 above) and Westlake, *IT* 206 and 207 (n. 48 below).

did surrender himself all the same.⁴⁷ On the other hand, Nikias surrenders to Gylippus only when the Athenian retreat becomes a savage carnage for his desperate men, and it is clear that he begs his mercy not for himself, but for the rest of his army (27. 5: "Ἐλεος ὑμᾶς, ὦ Γύλιππε, λαβέτω νικῶντας, ἐμοῦ μὲν μηδεὶς . . . τῶν δ' ἄλλων Ἀθηναίων . . .").⁴⁸

In view of Plutarch's severe judgement on Nikias, as the preceding pages have tried to show, and also taking into account the scarcely commendable *Life* of Crassus, I would suggest that the *Nikias-Crassus* pair was amongst those that were intended to portray examples to be avoided rather than imitated.⁴⁹ These examples Plutarch wrote towards the end of the whole series, so that, as he himself says, the reader of his biographies might not be left, in his quest for virtue, without accounts of the bad and blameworthy.⁵⁰ Now, examples of vice *par excellence* are the *Lives* of Demetrius and Antony, but, in a wider context of uncommendable or less commendable characters, one can also include the pairs *Alkibiades-Coriolanus* and *Pyrrhus-Marius*. This suggestion is supported, perhaps, by the relative chronology of the *Lives* as established by C. P. Jones; for, according to Jones's arrangement, the *Nikias-Crassus* pair along with the other three just mentioned are amongst the very last of Plutarch's biographies.⁵¹ This arrangement and the chronological consequences it entails could also account for Plutarch's different standpoint regarding the importance of ἀσφάλεια and εὐλάβεια in the *Lives* of Perikles and

⁴⁷ Cf. *Crassus* 30–31. His last words to his closest officers are indeed tragic in their irony. 30. 5: ὁρᾶτε τῆς ἐμῆς ὁδοῦ τὴν ἀνάγκην καὶ σύνοιστε παρόντες, ὡς αἰσχρὰ πάσῳ καὶ βίαία, τοῖς δ' ἄλλοις ἅπασιν ἀνθρώποις λέγετε σωθέντες, ὡς Κράσσος ἀπατηθεὶς ὑπὸ τῶν πολεμίων, οὐκ ἐκδοθεὶς ὑπὸ τῶν πολιτῶν ἀπώλετο. But, the actual circumstances—according to Plutarch's account—in which Crassus was killed and the subsequent humiliation of his body (31. 5–7) makes, perhaps, his death more disgraceful than that of Nikias.

⁴⁸ Cf. also Thuc. 7. 85. 1: Νικίας Γυλίππῳ ἐαυτὸν παραδίδωσι, πιστεύσας μᾶλλον αὐτῷ ἢ τοῖς Συρακοσίοις· καὶ ἐαυτῷ μὲν χρήσασθαι ἐκέλευεν ἐκεῖνόν τε καὶ Λακεδαιμονίους ὃ, τι βούλονται, τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους στρατιώτας παύσασθαι φονεύοντας. This is further "evidence of his unselfish devotion to the men under his command" (Westlake, *IT* 207; cf. Connor 204), but his motive in choosing to surrender to Gylippus has been suspected. Westlake again (l. c.) rightly justifies Nikias. "That he tried to seize a possible chance of saving his own life when his death could not benefit the Athenians would be judged by many to be a pardonable, even sensible action. Had he lived, he would surely have made efforts to persuade the Syracusans to mitigate their inhuman treatment of the Athenian prisoners."

⁴⁹ In view of the character and the career of Crassus, the very fact that Plutarch chose him to pair with Nikias shows, perhaps, that he regarded Nikias as something of a failure.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Demetrius* 1. 6: οὕτω μοι δοκοῦμεν καὶ ἡμεῖς προθυμότεροι τῶν βελτιόνων ἔσεσθαι καὶ θεαταὶ καὶ μιμηταὶ βίων, εἰ μὴδὲ τῶν φαύλων καὶ ψεγομένων ἀνιστορήτως ἔχοιμεν.

⁵¹ "Towards a Chronology of Plutarch's Works," *JRS* 56 (1966) 68.

Fabius, where cautiousness and regard for safety are clearly praised;⁵² but the *Perikles-Fabius* pair, being the tenth of his biographies (*Per.* 2. 5), stands almost in the middle of the whole series and therefore must have been written several years earlier than the *Nikias-Crassus* pair.⁵³

As for the points unexpectedly accredited to Crassus in the *Comparison*, I think that they must be attributed to Plutarch's deliberate effort to maintain some balance between the two men, a feature characterizing nearly all his *Comparisons*.⁵⁴ For, as a matter of fact, Nikias emerges superior to Crassus on almost every score. The way he acquired and—especially—used his wealth was not so discreditable, but even commendable in many respects (cf. *Comp.* ch. 1); his political conduct was more dignified, despite his timidity and cautiousness, and his political achievements, notably the peace bearing his name, more praiseworthy (2. 1–3, 7); his military capacities and successes far more important (3. 6, 5. 1–2); even his religious fearfulness, although responsible for some of his political mistakes (notably his failure to extricate in time the Athenian force from Sicily, p. 327 f. above), is regarded as preferable to Crassus' lack of respect for traditional beliefs and practices.⁵⁵ Plutarch comes to the end of his *Comparison*, and the only points he has accredited to Crassus—namely that he dared to contend with greater political opponents, and that his ambition to conquer the East was not blameworthy (2. 4, 4)—are minimal and doubtful. He has said many things against Nikias, of course (esp. 3. 1–5), by which he tried to detract from his superiority, but the scales nonetheless incline clearly to Nikias' side. At this point, it seems to me, Plutarch felt obliged to write something distinctly in favor of Crassus and against Nikias, but the only thing left for comparison was the way the two men died. So Plutarch

⁵² See esp. *Perikles* 18. 1 (Ἐν ταῖς στρατηγίαις εὐδοκίμει μάλιστα διὰ τὴν ἀσφάλειαν, οὔτε μάχης ἐχούσης πολλὴν ἀδελότητα καὶ κίνδυνον ἐκουσίως ἀπτόμενος, οὔτε τοὺς ἐκ τοῦ παραβάλλεσθαι χρησαμένους τύχῃ λαμπρᾷ καὶ θαυμασθέντας ὡς μεγάλους ζηλῶν καὶ μιμούμενος στρατηγούς) and contrast *Nik.* 6. 2 (p. 4 above). See also *Per.* 8. 6 and *Fab.* 1. 6 (οὐσαν . . . εὐβουλίαν δὲ τὴν εὐλάβειαν), 5, 17. 7.

⁵³ It should be added, though, that in the case of Plutarch a long lapse of time cannot always be postulated to explain divergences in his approach and attitude, as is indeed the case in other authors. Plutarch, however, is a particularly multifarious and unconventional writer, and the interpretation of his material depends each time on the particular purpose he wants to serve. As C.B.R. Pelling, "Plutarch's adaptation of his source-material," *JHS* 100 (1980) 131, puts it: "In each *Life* Plutarch selected the interpretation which suited the run of his argument." Cf. also Gossage (*op. cit.* n. 1 above) 55–56 and n. 55 below.

⁵⁴ Cf. Barrow (*op. cit.* n. 1 above) 59: "Plutarch is at pains to give each hero his due; indeed he sometimes seems anxious to make the score equal." See also A. Wardman, *Plutarch's Lives* (London 1974) 236 ff.

⁵⁵ *Comp.* 5. 3: ἐπιεικέστερον δὲ τοῦ παρανόμου καὶ αὐθάδους τὸ μετὰ δόξης παλαιᾶς καὶ συνήθους δι' εὐλάβειαν ἀμαρτανόμενον. But in the *De Superst.* 169A Plutarch says that it might have been better for Nikias to have committed suicide than to cause the death of so many people and meet himself an inglorious end on account of his superstition. Cf. n. 53 above.

proceeds to enhance Crassus and belittle Nikias by straining the evidence and even contradicting himself. The *Comparison* closes with the statement that Crassus' death was less reproachable and that of Nikias more disgraceful, because the latter surrendered himself to the enemy, whereas the former did not (5. 4). The factual evidence is, as we have seen (p. 330 f.), totally against this interpretation, but the desired balance between the two men has somehow been restored.

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